

Message Text

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PAGE 01 LONDON 01848 01 OF 02 051748Z

45

ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 SAJ-01

OMB-01 IO-11 /072 W

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R 051724Z FEB 76

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8754

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

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AMCONSUL EDINBURGH

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 01848

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PDEV, PGOV, UK

SUBJECT: LABOR PARTY STEPS UP PRESSURE ON DISSIDENT SCOTS

REF: (A) LONDON 452 (NOTAL); (B) LONDON 907 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY - SCOTTISH COUNCIL OF LABOR PARTY (SCLP) FEBRUARY
3 ANNOUNCED THAT PARTY MEMBERS WHO JOIN NEW SCOTTISH LA-
BOR PARTY (SLP) HAVE EXCLUDED THEMSELVES FROM LABOR PARTY
MEMBERSHIP. REGULAR CONSTITUENCY ORGANIZATIONS OF THE
TWO PRO-SLP LABOR MOS ARE PREPARING TO SELECT OFFICIAL
LABOR CANDIDATES FOR NEXT GENERAL ELECTION, PLACING AD-
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PAGE 02 LONDON 01848 01 OF 02 051748Z

DITIONAL PRESSURE ON THE DISSIDENTS. THESE DEVELOPMENTS

HAVE INCREASED LIKELIHOOD THAT OPEN. OFFICIAL BREAK BETWEEN SCLP AND SLP WILL OCCUR SHORTLY. SPLIT WOULD THREATEN GOVERNMENT'S MAJORITY IN COMMONS AND ITS LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM, THOUGH WE UNDERSTAND GOVERNMENT. AT LEAST FOR MOMENT. IS DETERMINED TO AVOID EXPELLING DISSIDENT MPS SILLARS AND ROBERTSON FROM PARLIAMENTARY LABOR PARTY (PLP). LONGER TERM IMPLICATIONS OF THESE DEVELOPMENTS MAY, AMONG OTHER THINGS, SPELL END OF SINGLE PARTY MAJORITIES IN PARLIAMENT FOR YEARS TO COME. END SUMMARY.

1. SCLP SECRETARY JAMES MCGRANDLE FEBRUARY 3 ANNOUNCED THAT LABOR PARTY MEMBERS WHO JOIN NEWLY-FORMED SLO (REF-TELS) HAVE EXCLUDED THEMSELVES FROM MEMBERSHIP IN PARTY. THIS ANNOUNCEMENT, WHICH INCREASES LIKELIHOOD OF DIRECT LABOR/SLP CONFRONTATION, CAME MORE QUICKLY THAN HAD BEEN EXPECTED, AS BOTH LABOR LEADERSHIP AND SLP HAD EARLIER OPTED TO AVOID DIRECT CHALLENGE ON DUAL MEMBERSHIP QUESTION. LABOR PARTY OFFICIALS TOLD EMBOFF THAT DECISION TO ESCALATE WAS RESULT OF "PROVOCATIVE" STATEMENTS BY DISSIDENT LABOR MPS JIM SILLARS AND JOHN ROBERTSON IN WHICH THEY ASSERTED THEIR INTENTION TO STAND FOR RE-ELECTION ON SLP TICKET. WE BELIEVE, HOWEVER, THAT IMPRESSIVE SLP START (ITS ORGANIZERS CLAIM OVER 1500 DUES PAYING MEMBERS IN LESS THAN ONE MONTH OF LIFE) AND RECENT SCOTTISH NATIONAL PARTY (SNP) VICTORIES IN LOCAL BY-ELECTIONS FORCED SCLP TO TRY TO STEM THE FLOW OF SUPPORT AWAY FROM THE LABOR PARTY.

2. ROBERTSON'S LABOR PARTY CONSTITUENCY (PAISLEY) ORGANIZATION HAS RECEIVED APPROVAL FROM LABOR PARTY HEADQUARTERS (TRANSPORT HOUSE) TO BEGIN PROCESS OF SELECTING NEW OFFICIAL CANDIDATE, WHILE SILLARS' SOUTH AYRSHIRE CONSTITUENCY HAS DEMANDED THAT HE CLARIFY HIS INTENTIONS BY FEBRUARY 7. IF SILLARS FAILS TO RESPOND, TRANSPORT HOUSE WILL APPROVE COMMENCEMENT OF SELECTION PROCESS IN THAT CONSTITUENCY.

3. LABOR PARTY NATIONAL ORGANIZER REG UNDERHILL TOLD EMBOFF THAT ABOVE ACTIONS WERE CLEARED WITH TRANSPORT HOUSE. GOVERNMENT AND PLP. LABOR PARTY LEADERS NOW AP-CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 LONDON 01848 01 OF 02 051748Z

PEAR TO BELIEVE SILLARS AND COHORTS ARE PREPARED TO GO ALL THE WAY AND THAT TO DELAY FINAL BREAK WILL ONLY ALLOW THEM TO EXPLOIT THEIR CONNECTIONS WITH OFFICIAL PARTY AND CONSOLIDATE THEIR GAINS.

4. GOVERNMENT, AS A RESULT, IS IN TOUGH CORNER. EXPULSION OF SILLARS AND ROBERTSON, AT LEAST TECHNICALLY. WILL MEAN THAT THEY ALSO FACE EXPULSION FROM PLP AND THUS LOSE

LABOR WHIP IN COMMONS. THIS WOULD ELIMINATE GOVERNMENT'S
CURRENT SINGLE SEAT MAJORITY AND END LABOR'S RIGHT TO
MAJORITY ON COMMITTEES, ALLOWING OPPOSITION TO CONTROL
CONTENT AND PACE OF LEGISLATION IN VITAL COMMITTEE
STAGES. (EXPULSION WOULD NOT THREATEN GOVERNMENT'S WOR-
KING MAJORITY IN COMMONS. AS SLP MUCH PREFERS LABOR TO
CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT.) CHIEF WHIP BOB MELLISH MET
EVENING OF FEBRUARY 4 TO DISCUSS THIS PROBLEM WITH PLP
LEADERS AND TRANSPORT HOUSE OFFICIALS. NOT SURPRISINGLY,

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PAGE 01 LONDON 01848 02 OF 02 051742Z

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 LONDON 01848

THEY DECIDED TO IGNORE ACTIONS AND DECISIONS OF SCLP FOR THE TIME BEING. FOR ITS PART, TRANSPORT HOUSE WILL SEEK TO AVOID ANY ACTION WHICH WOULD THREATEN STATUS QUO IN PLP. HOW LONG THIS POSITION CAN BE SUSTAINED IN FACE OF EVENTS, HOWEVER, IS UNCLEAR.

5. IT IS EVIDENT THAT GOVERNMENT WISHES TO BUY TIME. IF THE EXPULSION OF SILLARS AND ROBERTSON CAN BE DELAYED UNTIL APRIL, A GOOD PART OF THE GOVERNMENT'S MOST CONTROVERSIAL LEGISLATION (E.G., AEROSPACE INDUSTRY NATIONALI-
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PAGE 02 LONDON 01848 02 OF 02 051742Z

ZATION) WILL HAVE CLEARED COMMITTEE STAGES. IN ANY EVENT, A BY-ELECTION LOSS OF THE VACANT AND VULNERABLE LABOR SEAT IN COVENTRY WOULD ERASE THE GOVERNMENT'S MAJORITY. SHOULD THAT SEAT BE LOST, THE STATUS OF SILLARS AND ROBERTSON WOULD BECOME MOOT, AND FORMAL EXPULSION OF THE DISSIDENTS COULD BE EXPECTED TO FOLLOW. THE SLP'S ULTIMATE IMPACT ON THE VOLATILE SCOTTISH POLITICAL SCENE CANNOT BE PREDICTED AT THIS POINT, BUT IT SEEMS CERTAIN THAT IT WILL DAMAGE THE OFFICIAL LABOR PARTY IN SCOTLAND, PERHAPS SERIOUSLY. IF THIS HAPPENS, THE ODDS AGAINST THE LABOR PARTY'S WINNING AN OVERALL PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY IN FUTURE GENERAL ELECTIONS WILL INCREASE SHARPLY. INDEED, RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN SCOTLAND MAY WELL ENSURE THAT SINGLE PARTY MAJORITY GOVERNMENT IN BRITAIN IS A THING OF THE PAST.

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